



## Parents in the Migratory Space between Past, Present and Future

### The Everyday Impact of Intergenerational Dynamics on Refugee Families' Resettlement in Denmark

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## PARENTS IN THE MIGRATORY SPACE BETWEEN PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE:

### *The everyday impact of intergenerational dynamics on refugee families' resettlement in Denmark*

#### Abstract

This article explores the everyday experiences of resettlement among newly recognised refugee parents living in rural Denmark. Comparing two ethnographic case stories, it enquires into the ways in which the parents try to create a sense of belonging and pursue life coherence and a positive outlook on the future within the everyday sociocultural framework of the Danish welfare state. It is argued that they mostly comprehend and carry out their strivings for a better future by means of a narratively grounded, intergenerational rationale. This rationale invites them to assess the success of the family's entire act of migration in terms of what the future promises for their children. This article thus illuminates and crystallises how among newly recognised refugee families, mundane intergenerational dynamics form a crucial relational and temporal factor with regard to the parents' building of existential well-being, societal trust and aspirations for 'integration' into the Danish welfare society.

#### Keywords

Refugee resettlement • Parenthood • Intergenerationality • Migration narratives • Danish welfare state integration politics •

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## Introduction

In recent decades, studies in Europe have shown how the majority populations have expressed a growing 'cultural anxiety' towards increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees (Grillo 2003). Similarly, the influx of refugees to Denmark has been met with widespread, negative media attention (Hervik 2011) combined with political fears over its socioeconomic and cultural consequences for the future cohesiveness of the Danish welfare society (Jenkins 2012). Obviously, fears of immigration and fears of a dissolving welfare society tend to intersect with nationalist political discourse in Denmark (Jöhncke 2011). It has been argued that the welfare system has become so closely linked to what is perceived to be Danish that 'Danishness' and 'the welfare state' are today inseparable (Olwig & Pærregaard 2011a). Accordingly, throughout the last two decades, national legislative frameworks and 'integration' programs targeting at non-Western newcomers have insistently been implemented. Meanwhile, anthropologists have shown how such interventions intended to include and prevent segregation in and by themselves often foster experiences of marginalisation amongst immigrant and refugee citizens (Olwig & Pærregaard 2011b). The very efforts of the Danish welfare system to 'integrate' immigrants and refugees result in the explicit marking out of a category of citizens perceived not to be proper members of the society and hence in need of special attention and means of intervention in order to be turned

into full citizens (Olwig & Pærregaard 2011a). One such 'integration' intervention is the national spatial dispersal policy that subjects newly recognised refugees to a three-year mandatory placement around the country. This policy formed part of Denmark's first Integration Law (*Integrationsloven*) introduced in 1999, and its political aim was to promote new refugees' inclusion into mainstream Danish society and reduce their risk of becoming marginalised in urban multi-ethnic areas by securing a more even geographical distribution. If refugees move away from the municipality they have been assigned to within this three-year introductory period, they lose their right to welfare benefits (for an extensive analysis of the Danish refugee dispersal practice and its local outcomes, see Larsen 2011a).

In Nordic migration studies, the social incorporation of non-Western immigrants and refugees into the Nordic welfare societies has been a central research concern across the board of studies, comprising an attentiveness to the impact of national political 'integration' discourse and legislation on immigrants' and refugees' own everyday senses of belonging, inclusion and trust in the society (Olwig, Larsen & Rytter 2012). In this respect, studies have pointed out on how strong social ties of mutual trust within co-ethnic minority groups seem to facilitate the individuals' wider development of general trust in the society (Larsen 2011a; Nannestad, Svendsen & Svendsen 2008). Based on long-term research among newly recognised refugee families living in rural areas in Denmark because of the national spatial dispersal policy, this article sets out to contribute to this examination

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of immigrants' and refugees' everyday creations of belonging and societal trust in a Nordic context. However, in so doing, I wish to move the focus from the level of the 'ethnic community' to the social institution of 'the family' by exploring how everyday intergenerational dynamics between parents and their children influence newly arrived refugee parents' creations of well-being, future hope and trust (or the opposite) in the society.

Anthropological and sociological studies in North America have shown that immigrant parents often assess and experience the family's social mobility in terms of the future prospects for their children (Foner 2009; Stepick & Stepick 2003; Waters 1999). In a Nordic context, this article explores how a similar intergenerational rationale applies to parents who have migrated as refugees and the ways in which it proves crucial to refugee families' overall settlement process. On the one hand, as regards refugee parents' everyday creations of belonging and well-being in relation to the surrounding society, seen from such an intergenerational perspective Danish studies have pointed to the importance of the capacity of the parents to transfer social capital and provide guidance to the next generation with respect to such aspects as religious practices (Pedersen 2011) and educational aspiration (Larsen 2013). On the other hand, there is a lacuna in the literature when it comes to the intergenerational dynamics pertaining to refugee parents' building of societal trust and how societal (dis-) trust reveals and transmits to the next generation in everyday life. These are crucial enquiries – not least in the case of the Nordic welfare societies, including Denmark – that have been characterised as the world's most intervening into their citizens' everyday private lives (Stenius 1997). Accordingly, the Danish welfare state's 'integration' interventions tend to interfere into the innermost private life spheres of new refugees, including family life and the intergenerational relations that it builds upon (Larsen 2011a, 2011b, 2017).

Owing to its extensive public and legislative focus on 'integration', the Danish welfare state is omnipresent in the daily lives and routines of newly recognised refugee families. This is not simply so in the sense of an intangible societal figuration but also in a very concrete sense as a sort of second 'head of family' whose authority is already woven into the very fabric of their new everyday lives (see also Larsen 2011a). This adds complexity to the individual refugee family's overall settlement process and to its members' building of belonging and trust in the society. By and large, this everyday trilateral resettlement establishment – encompassing parents, children and the welfare state system – makes newly recognised refugee parents' mundane formations of belonging and trust in the Danish society a very intricate matter that cannot, I suggest, be appreciated under the fixed heading of 'integration'. According to the categorical criteria officially formulated by Danish policy-makers, 'successful integration' and 'integration potentiality' are simply reduced to individual motivation and will. Against this background, this article sets out to analytically unpack and exemplify how intergenerational dynamics that are generated and shaped by the everyday encounter of newly arrived refugee parents, their children and the Danish welfare state prove much more influential and decisive than questions of parental intention, motivation and will alone.

Based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork, in 2011, I ended a research study with newly recognised refugee families of various national origins located in Danish rural areas. By interacting with five families on a daily basis in their homes and local surroundings over the course of a year, I broadly investigated how they experienced settling in and becoming part of the Danish society in the specific context of the rural communities to which they had been allocated and which, in several cases, were populated entirely by ethnic Danes.

This was done through the methods of ethnographic participant observation and interviews with adults, adolescents and children. As specified, in this article, I focus on the issue of intergenerationality and its impact on the parents' senses of belonging, inclusion and trust in the Danish society.

Using comparative ethnographic cases from two refugee households, I show how the parents' everyday practices and experiences of resettlement are embedded in an overall migration story that is structured and narrated around an intergenerational axis of motion. The case stories illustrate how in Denmark the parents dream of being able to provide their children with a better and more secure future in the form of a life with schooling, education and human respect – and lack of discrimination – from the social surroundings. By drawing on narration theory by Carr (1991), which allows – I propose – for an understanding of the individual family's entire act of migrating as that of a narratively structured motion in and of itself, I analyse how the parents come to weigh its success precisely through the prospects of their wishes for the children seeming to come true or not. The specific outlook for the future, which the parents – within the everyday framework of the Danish welfare state – envision for their children, thus becomes vital to the parents' own senses of belonging, future hope and trust in the society (or the opposite). The case stories of the two households epitomize this overall analytical finding across the full sample of families involved in the research study. They have been singled out for the purpose of this article as – in comparison – they crystallize how this intergenerational rationality may foster quite converse resettlement outcomes.

## 'Here You Really Feel Freedom': Case Story of a Palestinian Family

I am discussing two families of which one consists of stateless Palestinians, the parents, both practicing Muslims, having been born and brought up in Lebanon. Owing to the difficult conditions for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, the parents migrated as adolescents to Libya in the 1970s, where later they met, married and had four children. While the mother was a housewife, the father worked as a craftsman. The members of the family lived for 26 years as Palestinians in Libya without any official rights as citizens and suffered from discrimination from the host population and the, now former, Libyan regime and police on a daily basis. Eventually, they succeeded in fleeing to Denmark, where a considerable number of the mother's kin had already settled years earlier (among them, her parents and her eleven brothers and sisters who have established each their own families today).

To begin with, their applications for asylum were refused. However, as both Libya and Lebanon refused to take them back, the Danish authorities ended up granting them residence permits after having spent six years in different asylum centres in Denmark. Meanwhile, the parents had had their fifth child. The family was relocated to the small town of Næsdal (4,300 inhabitants) placed in a rural municipality.<sup>1</sup> According to themselves, they have never seen another Arabic family residing in Næsdal where by the beginning of the fieldwork, the family had been living for one and a half years.

The father, 48-year-old Aalim, had been traumatised. He had constant psychosomatic pains and frequently suffered from attacks of fainting and cramps, followed by hospitalisation. Owing to his condition, the father had been exempted from following the three-year language and civic programme that is otherwise compulsory for newly recognised refugees in Denmark. The mother, 40-year-old Rabah, had also been exempted, as she was classed as retired

through disability. Besides being inflicted with a difficult depression, she suffered from a range of phobia: rain, windy weather, moving outside, driving cars, darkness and being alone. Respectively, the family's five children (Hadia, 24 years; Walid, 23 years; Omar, 16 years; Adina, 13 years; and Fahim, five years) participated in a youth language school in the nearest larger town, an hour's bus ride away, and in the public school and the kindergarten in the Næsdal town itself. The children all spoke Danish well and were in good mental and physical health. Rabah was carrying her sixth child. Daily, both parents complained about pains in their heads and different parts of the body. Most of the day, the father lay in bed or sat on a mattress on the floor of the living room holding his head while chain-smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee, and looked tired and had a grey face.

Before the first visit to the family, I had a meeting with the municipality's only integration social worker. When I asked her if the family knows any Danes in the area, for instance their neighbours, she answered: 'No and I don't think they are interested in getting to know any Danes. The mother just wants to run her own little Palestine at home. And the father just wants to make the mother happy'. Some hours later, on my way to the family, the taxi driver turned out to be the chairlady of the Danish Refugee Council's local volunteer relief-working group in the area and therefore she as well knew of the family. I thus asked her the same question: Whether the Palestinian family knows any local Danes? Firmly she answered: 'No, they are not interested in getting to know Danes at all'.

When entering the Palestinian family's small apartment, my immediate impression of their outward social life was coloured by the words of the chairlady and social worker about the family's 'anti-social' behaviour and lack of interest in their Danish surroundings. To this came my own biased assumptions of their social life inwardly, when I witnessed their existence, as described earlier. In my early field notes, I put down these thoughts: 'What life do they have other than a continuous asylum centre existence completely unchanged by the fact that they have been granted asylum in the meantime'. Now they had spent six years in Danish asylum centres, dreaming of being granted residence permits, and what had they ended up with? A life of trauma, phobias, depression, fainting and cramps, physical pain, social isolation, no local networks and no Danish language skills or prospects of any, as the parents will never participate in either the language school or the labour market.

However, as time went by, I realised that the parents do indeed have a life – according to them, a *good* life. First, in their own words, they have freedom and an inner peace, which they did not have in Libya. Aalim explains:

As a Palestinian refugee, in Libya you are treated as twentieth-class humans. You have no rights and are not respected or regarded as a human. Whenever I left my home, I always carried a fear on my back with me. Libyans kill as easily as putting out a cigarette. Here there is rest! I now feel peace of mind, no matter how far away I am from my home. Here, one really feels freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Aalim describes how, when arriving home at night, he never knew whether he would find his family sent to prison. Nor do they any longer spend every day living in fear – as in their years in the asylum centres – that the Danish immigration police will send them back to all of that. It seems banal, but still perhaps it can be difficult to grasp fully that freedom from harassment can almost endow life with enough quality in itself. However, the purpose of the parents' daily lives is very much constituted through this sense of freedom and through the knowledge that – because of this freedom – their children now have

a future. The latter in many respects constitutes the entire cohesive force of the parents' present-day lives. When I asked Aalim what he had expected of Denmark prior to his arrival, he replied:

I envisaged what you normally do when you move from one country to another. I had a hope that I would be able to build a better future – and improve the living conditions for my family. That is what you wish the most: a future for your children where they can live in peace and feel secure. Such a future they have now been given.

Hence, the envisioned future for their children ascribes meaning to the parents' present everyday lives and thus has an integrating effect, here understood in terms of an inner personal integrity in the form of a sense of existential meaning and coherence in life within one's present surroundings. That is to say, not understood in terms of the politically defined and more outward form of 'integration', which rather refers to the individual contributing to society socially and economically by taking an active part in one's surroundings as a fellow citizen. Still, however, the two levels – the family's personal integrity inwardly and a more civic social 'integration' – are closely interconnected, as shows from what follows.

### **'We Have Never Met a Hostile Dane'**

As was the case in every family I spent time with during my fieldwork, a range of daily life conditions existed with which the members of the Palestinian family were strongly discontented. For instance, they often expressed their deeply felt lack of the mother's relatives and regretted having been located in an entirely different part of the country, far from them. At times when the father suffered from many attacks or was hospitalised, expressions of this lack intensified. Likewise, the family members complained about their economic pressures in everyday life, caused by the fairly low welfare 'introductory payment' for recognised refugees in Denmark, which by the time amounted to 60 per cent of normal social welfare benefits. Moreover, they felt dissatisfied with the small size of their flat and its overall state of repair. Neither the adults nor the children were reluctant in making me aware of these dissatisfactions, but overall, I never witnessed such conditions being interpreted as a sort of social despising of them as refugees or that – as was the case in relation to other families in the study – they translated into actual mistrust towards 'Denmark', its population or 'the Danish system' as such. On the contrary, the Palestinian family members all showed quite a strong trust on their Danish surroundings and, largely, always talked about them positively.

One evening, for example, when the family and I sat together in the living room having tea, the members of the family, speaking all at once, told me that they had never met a rude or hostile Dane:

Everybody here in town says hello. All places we go we only meet smiles, especially from the elderly. People are friendly. We have never experienced anyone staring disparagingly at us. We have never felt discriminated against by anyone here in Denmark, only by one police officer from the immigration authorities. But except for him, we have never met a hostile Dane. One feels that one is welcome and that they respect you.

Similar spontaneous remarks on Danes and the Danish society were frequently uttered. The mother, Rabah, for instance, one day uttered:

In Denmark, you feel that you are a human being with equal rights. You do not feel any differential treatment at all. We are all equal. Ever since we were finally granted asylum, we have not experienced any dissimilarity between the treatment of ourselves and Danes. We thank God for this and hope we can continue to stay here – *Inshallah!* [If God wants].

'We have never met a hostile Dane!' When I heard this remark, it struck me that many Danes in Næsdal would have no idea how positively the family thinks about them. Conversely, the family itself has no idea how antisocial many in town might think of them, including the integration social worker and the chairlady of the local volunteer refugee relief-working group, understanding the family as 'just wanting to run their own little Palestine', as the former put it.

While not only the adult members of this family but also their children and adolescents were very positively disposed towards the Danish society, in accordance with a purely political approach to 'integration', however, the parents could be said to be relatively 'non-integrated' into the Danish society. This is measured in parameters such as financial self-support, participation in the labour market, Danish language skills and social interaction with Danes, which in themselves constitute four of the seven governmentally formulated criteria for the 'successful integration' of immigrants and refugees, and none of which the Palestinian parents will come to fulfil.<sup>3</sup> However, the parents nonetheless experienced that their children now had a future, and out of this experience, through an intergenerational rationale, a sense of meaning and coherence in life was generated. Precisely, out of this sense of personal integrity – the experience of life making sense and having value – the parents, in spite of severe physical and mental health conditions, acquired the personal resources to feel trust and be positively disposed towards the Danish society, values that recognizably in daily life they transmitted to their children. The Palestinian parents' sense of personal *integrity* in their lives, on the one hand, and societal '*integration*' in a more political sense, on the other hand, thus cannot be separated when considered from a wider intergenerational perspective.

### 'Our Children Will Grow Very Stubborn Here': Case Story of a Sudanese Family

The second family that I discuss is the Christian Sudanese family originating from southern Sudan who had lived for the past 20 years in a United Nations (UN) refugee camp in northern Uganda. The mother was a housewife, while the father worked as a teacher's assistant at the local school in the refugee camp. Eventually, a Danish ministerial delegation selected the parents to come to Denmark as UN-quota refugees together with their three youngest children, aged 22, 16 and nine years.<sup>4</sup> Upon arrival in Denmark, they were relocated directly to the same rural municipality as the Palestinian family, although in the small village of *Fuglestrup* (500 residents). By the beginning of fieldwork, they had been in Denmark for seven months. The children aged 16 and nine years, Barbara and Ivan, respectively, attended the public school in the town of Næsdal, where – together with two of the Palestinian family's children – they were the only pupils with refugee backgrounds. Rachel, 22-year old, had two small children, who attended the local kindergarten in the village of Fuglestrup itself. The family and the eldest daughter, Rachel, lived on separate floors in a large house on the main road passing through the village, where the family members were the only refugees.

Seen from the perspective of Danish political criteria for 'successful integration', the family can be regarded as more

'integrationable' than the Palestinian family: The parents, 44-year-old Emmanuel and 42-year-old Miranda, were in good health. Both parents and Rachel followed the obligatory three-year language and civic programme for adult refugees in the nearest large town, which was one and a half hours bus drive away. Both parents wished to get jobs soon to enable them to support themselves, and they regretted not knowing any residents in the village. The parents participated with pleasure in all events that took place together with Danes (such as Christmas bazaars or trips to the zoo), arranged by the local volunteer refugee relief-working group. In other words, to begin with, the parents displayed a strong dedication to 'integrate' in terms of Danish skills and education, employment, economic independence and contact with Danes, which constitute no less than four of the before mentioned seven governmental criteria for 'successful integration' (see note 3). However, having spent some time together with the family, I found that gradually its adult members became more and more sceptical about having to live their lives in Denmark. They felt an enormous loss at having left their earlier ways and practices of living, and they had a hard time in general finding their feet in their new Danish surroundings.

### 'Africans Listen by Beating'

The lack of feeling at ease among the adult members of the Sudanese family was due to several coexisting factors. One such factor is that they were not surrounded by any established kinsmen in Denmark who could act as trusted social and cultural mediators, partly to introduce them as newcomers to local cultural values and everyday routines, and show them how to navigate in relation to these in order to avoid conflicts with their surrounding professional and civic contacts (Larsen 2011a) and partly to contribute to their building of personal trust, generally in the Danish welfare system as such (ibid). Other factors are that, due to Danish immigration laws, they could not be reunited in Denmark with family members they longed for, in addition to finding themselves in a scrape caused by not being able to live up to the expectations of remittances expressed by relatives left behind in the Ugandan refugee camp. However, the single factor that has had the greatest negative impact on the belief of the adult family members in a good and auspicious future for the family in Denmark was the difference in everyday child-raising routines or more precisely the differing perceptions of which methods of raising children generate and do not generate a respectable and harmonious adult individual. This is illustrated by the following extract from a conversation with the eldest daughter, Rachel, the mother of five-year-old Andreas and three-year-old Sam:

This law that you cannot hit your children if they do something wrong, it's not a good law, because in Uganda ... I mean, Africans listen by beating! Beating is not killing. You want him to become a good person – so you beat him so that he can listen to what he has done wrong! The child will not die. But here, if I beat them, Andreas will go and tell them in the kindergarten that 'Oh, I was beaten yesterday'. Once he did that, and when I went to the kindergarten, the teacher said that if I beat Andreas again, they will come and collect him and Sam and they will take them to another place. But if a child is doing a wrong thing, and if he is not being punished, the child will grow *bad*. Hm! These Danish people ... their children will grow not good. My children will grow very very stubborn here, and they will not listen *anything* if they grow here ... If they reach, let's say, 15 years in Denmark, I don't know whether these children will be good persons.<sup>5</sup>



As a mother, Rachel was convinced that the framework within which she was expected to raise her children in Denmark – the legal prohibition on hitting them – will in itself destroy her children (i.e. ‘they will grow bad’, ‘they will grow not good’, ‘they will grow very stubborn’, ‘they will not become good persons’). The following remark by Miranda – Rachel’s, Barbara’s and Ivan’s mother – further illustrates this reasoning. I should stress that the question she is answering was not posed to her in any context related to child raising:

Ego: What hopes do you have regarding your children’s future in Denmark?

Miranda: I have lost all hope. You see, when we came here the social worker told us that it is not like in Africa, where the parents are in charge. Here the children are also in charge, and you are not allowed to punish them if they do wrong. So I have lost all hope in the future. My children will become troublemakers. I have no hope left for them.

The father, Emmanuel, expressed his worries as well. He explained to me that without being able to physically discipline his children, he severely feared that they would just grow up fooling around, skipping schooling and education, which would result in them being unemployed and, hence, being ‘worth nothing’, as he puts it, in the eyes of other people.

As has appeared, the adult family members felt great unease and insecurity in reconciling themselves to the non-physical techniques of raising and disciplining children that their professional surroundings (the local integration social worker, school teachers, kindergarten staff, etc.) sought to make them acquire through a reformation of their whole understanding of the parent–child relation, which led to the family finding itself under close surveillance from local child welfare authorities (see also Larsen 2011a). Following from this, simply, the parents experienced a massive loss of authority and control and felt as having lost their children to a surrounding unfamiliar world. As Emmanuel expressed it: ‘It is no longer in my hands what is going to happen to my children – they now belong to the Danish welfare state, not to me.’

In short, the parents were convinced that their children would encounter great problems in the future and end up ill-mannered as ‘troublemakers’ and ‘bad persons’ if they continued growing up in a society where physical punishment is illegal (see also Ong 2003; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco 2001; Waters 1999). For Emmanuel, Miranda and Rachel, this conviction seemed to erode the entire basis of their being able to imagine a good and auspicious future for their family within their new country (i.e. ‘I have lost all hope’). This results from the fact that this entire basis for imagining such a future is precisely grounded in an intergenerational rationality, causing the success of the whole act of migrating to be assessed very much in terms of the prospects of the next generation growing up to be morally respectable individuals who function well in the society.

### ‘A Future for the Children Is What You Wish the Most’: the Parental Manoeuvring between Past Lives, Present Meaning and Future Visions

In 2005, the then Conservative Liberal government made an amendment to the Danish immigration law, which has since applied throughout shifting governments. With regard to Denmark’s annual reception of UN-quota refugees from around the world, this amendment implied that in future, such selections not simply should

the need of protection be taken into account but now too the so-called ‘integration potential’ of the individual refugees and refugee families. Among other factors, such as education, work experience and language qualifications, this potential is assessed in terms of whether the specific refugee has shown ‘motivation, vigour, initiative and strength of will’ [*‘motivation, handlekraft, initiativ og fremdrift’*], measured, for instance, through his or her daily activities in the UN refugee camp.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the before mentioned seven criteria for ‘successful integration’ suggest that an integration process is already in progress, so to speak, through these selection criteria for quota refugees, grounded in ‘integration potential’, the imperative was now to estimate *future* integration processes that have still not yet begun at the time of the assessment.

Contrary to the Palestinian family, who came to Denmark as asylum seekers, the Sudanese family, as UN-quota refugees, were precisely selected for transfer to Denmark based on such an assessment of the family’s potential for future ‘integration’. However, feeling severely uneasy with Danish norms and core values of raising children, the Sudanese parents found it difficult living up to the story that they were expected to be a part of – the story of the refugee family with great ‘integration’ potentials. In other words, they have had difficulties in fulfilling what was expected of them by the Danish welfare state.

In contrast, the Palestinian parents were faced with better chances of fitting in with the story that they had been inscribed into by the Danish welfare state: Through their official certification as persons on disability retirement, they can be said to have been given a sort of acknowledgement, respect and right: the right to be ill, so to speak. In other words, they can live up to what is expected of them from the Danish welfare state. In this way, their children are not – as in the Sudanese family – witnessing their parents insisting on or fighting for a specific narrative at the same time as they are inscribed into a completely different and conflicting narrative by the professional welfare workers surrounding them (such as the staffs at Sudanese Rachel’s sons’ kindergarten). The Palestinian children do not, then, like the Sudanese children, experience their parents losing face and authority (internally in the family and in the face of their local professional surroundings). While the Sudanese parents, as shown, exactly felt such *loss* of parental authority, control and respectability, the contrary can be said to be the case for the Palestinian parents. Having lived for the past 26 years a life of daily discrimination in Libya without enjoying fundamental respect as humans or basic civil rights, as shown, the parents are now in many ways experiencing an *increase* in their authority, control and respectability. Thus, in brief, it can be said that while the Sudanese parents experience their position as parents as being undermined, the Palestinian parents are rather being accorded such a position.

Yet, in order to further unpack the intergenerational rationality and its essentiality to the families’ resettlement and habituation process in the Danish society, I suggest a closer analysis of the families’ overall migration narratives. What significance does the intergenerationality as a focal point for action and experience hold in this migration narrative, in regard to both present-day life and future dreams and plans? What are the contextual repercussions of the past to this projected future, whether the personal expectations of migrating are met or not?

### The Migration Story and Its Intergenerational Pivot

Within anthropology, as a relational term, ‘generation’ captures both genealogical relations of kinship internally in a family and a society-structuring principle that refers to different social categories of individuals (such as ‘adults’, ‘children’ and ‘adolescents’), extending

beyond specific kinship relations. So far, I have shed light on a series of such relational aspects of the ethnographic material. Generation, though, is as much a temporal as a relational term, greatly being about connections and contrasts in a temporal perspective (Whyte, Erdmute & van der Geest 2008). At this instant, adopting a narrative perspective, I shall therefore examine some of the case stories' more temporal aspects.

As, amongst others, the philosopher Carr (1991) has pointed out, the temporal structure of narrations is marked by its simultaneously retrospective and forward-looking point of view, where past, present and future melt together, as it were, in a single event, action or experience. Hence, essential to the narration is that it takes shape through a particular – albeit all the time moving – point of view, from which a series of events is related to a larger whole. With regard to this unendingly, consecutive organizing of actions and experiences, to the individual the narration thus has a central function in terms of the creation of existential meaning and coherence. However, as Carr (ibid: 31) states, while quite a lot of theoretical work exists regarding the relation between narration and human experience, the narrative structure relating to human action has generally been the subject of much less attention.

Looking at the families' overall acts of migration as such human actions embedded in a narrative structure, at this level, the entire governing plot of the Sudanese parents' overall migration story can be said to have broken down, the intergenerational connection having played a decisive role in this breakdown: the parents could not find any meaning in a future life for their children in Denmark and thus neither for themselves. Unable to create existential meaning within their new societal surroundings, the entire cohesive force of the Sudanese parents' present-day lives seems to break down (i.e. 'I have lost all hope'). This is because the future horizon, which the parents see ahead of themselves in Denmark (where they are convinced that their children will grow into 'troublemakers' and 'bad persons') suddenly, and against their expectations, proves to converge with what they escaped from: wretchedness and distress. Thus, the 'beginning' and 'end' coincide in a circular motion that brings about a state of, in a way, 'being trapped in time'. The family's overall migration story has become cyclical, leading back to nowhere else than where they came from: hell, according to themselves. The overall story of the raising of their children into morally respectable persons within a new and promising land essentially broke down and instead turned into the sad story of a loss of all hope of being able to raise their children as harmonious well-functioning persons and ultimately a story of losing all hope for the future.

While the entire plot of the Sudanese family's overall migration story broke down, the case with respect to the Palestinian family members is quite different. For their part, largely they have succeeded in creating a general sense of meaning, trust and future hope in relation to their present-day lives in Denmark. This has taken place through the same intergenerational logic as for the Sudanese family, despite the differing outcomes. In contrast to life in Libya, the Palestinian parents have a perception that, within the framework of the Danish welfare society, their children will develop into morally respectable persons who function well, enjoying education, human respect and a lack of discrimination (a vision of the future their children share). In the formation of this positive outlook towards their present and future life in Denmark, the past as a life context plays a crucial role. The following is an excerpt from a conversation with the mother Rabah:

No matter where we go, we can never forget what we have been experiencing in Libya. My oldest daughter, Hadia, used to be one

of the best pupils in her school class in Libya, but, as we were refugees, they always gave her a fail mark, and good marks to the Libyan girls. But here in Denmark, when they see a well-mannered pupil who has the will to learn, then they help and support my children. I can see the difference between Libya and Denmark very well. Just try to imagine: even though we lived in another Arab country [Libya], we have never before experienced being accepted as we are in Denmark. When you regard the divergent treatments here and there, you thank God that you are here and not there. *Alhamdulillah!* [Thank God!].

With respect to present well-being and future orientation, in relation to the Sudanese family, the past as a reinterpreted life context plays an equally essential but rather divergent role. During my fieldwork, I observed how, as the parents' expectations of a better future for their children in Denmark were disappointed and as their overall migration story thus broke down, gradually they began reinterpreting their previous existence in Uganda and ascribing new meanings to it. Life in Uganda was now longed for with strong feelings and was itself turned into the solution to the otherwise miserable life horizon in Denmark, and a burning desire thus arose among the adult family members to return. The following example is from a conversation with Rachel, the mother of young Andreas and Sam:

I use to dream that I go back to Africa. In Uganda, even though you stay starving from morning up till sunset, you are feeling okay, because you are meeting and laughing with a lot of people. When I finish this first three years, I really want to go back. There, you live well and enjoy life. I will just go there, live, and get a small job. Because that is what Africa is about: to live fair and to talk and laugh with people. [Her own mother, Miranda, adds:] I miss Africa very much. It pains me so much living here that I think that if I could just *walk* to Uganda, I would do it right away. The only reason why I don't go back is that I don't have money for an airplane ticket and that I can't walk there on my feet.

Through what Carr (1991: 62) describes as 'the forward-backward grasp of the narrative act', the Sudanese parents, so to speak, changed the story's beginning (the past) in order to be able to change its ending (the future). The parents hereby inscribed into their story the act of returning as merely an 'intervening step' on the road to the realisation of the (still same) overall goal of action: a bright and auspicious future. The essential here, of course, is not whether this future return will assume the character of physical reality or not, but – as a horizon embedded in the lived present – that it is part of the parents' existential reality. Even though the Sudanese parents, as Miranda puts it, 'have lost all hope' of a bright future in Denmark for their children (and thereby also for themselves), this state of non-meaning and non-coherence in the present life still does not lead to an end of action: Rather than ceasing to act (here understood as the agency that lies in the individual's continuous attempt to create existential meaning and coherence in life), instead the Sudanese parents actively redirect the projected future of the narration by returning to its beginning, so to say, and thus changing the past.

## Conclusions

Based on ethnographic case studies deriving from two different newly recognised refugee families, in this article, I have dealt with the ways in which the parents' dreams and wishes for a better future in Denmark

essentially translate into everyday life through an intergenerational logic. With regard to the sense of existential meaning and coherence in life, which the parents must continuously strive to create within their new Danish surroundings, the generational dynamic between parents and children thus proves the most decisive relational matter I find in my research material. However, whereas the practice of an intergenerational rationality in the case of the Palestinian parents gave rise to the creation of a sense of belonging and trust in the Danish society, and here through a founding of meaning, coherence and future hope in relation to their present-day existence, the outcome of the same intergenerational logic proved quite the opposite in the case of the Sudanese parents.

As shown, for the Palestinian parents, their previous existence in Libya takes shape as a sort of *background* out of which they assess the quality of their present and future lives in Denmark. For the Sudanese parents' future orientation, it is rather that the past in Africa comes to take shape as the *foreground* – a longed for and distant place in time to which they dream about returning. This difference is of vital importance to the refugee parents' overall ability to settle in well and make themselves at home in the Danish society, because such developing of a sense of belonging requires – the analysis has suggested – that the parents' 'narrative' future lies in Denmark, meaning that they are able to see ahead of themselves a meaningful future for their children within the everyday framework of the Danish welfare society.

Such vital intergenerational dynamics, generated by the mundane encounter of refugee parents, their children and the Danish welfare state, are not easily condensed within politically formulated categorical 'integration' criteria. For example, those parents – measured through their 'motivation', 'initiative' and 'will' – who, in a UN refugee camp in another corner of the world, may show 'integration potential' (and who are therefore also thought later on to be able to reach a 'successful integration') are not necessarily the same parents who in Denmark succeed in creating meaning in life and trust in the society. As for this, the intergenerational dynamics being brought to life when a refugee family has to settle down in a new and unfamiliar society are way too individual, complex and unpredictable, besides having a fundamental impact on the overall settlement process reaching far beyond what can ever be captured politically by way of a fixed categorical apparatus of understanding. When it comes to newly recognised refugee parents' future orientations and desires for social inclusion into their host societies, intergenerational dynamic forces thus prove much more decisive than questions of parental intention, motivation and will alone, as otherwise so frequently underlined in public and political debates and in Denmark not least concretised in the many clear-cut criteria officially formulated by policy-makers, for

instance as to what regards 'successful integration' and the selection of UN-quota refugees on the grounds of 'integration potential'.

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## Notes

1. For ethical reasons, all names of places and interlocutors are pseudonyms, just as certain location-wise and personal details have been blurred.
2. Quotations from Aalim stem from recorded interviews by way of an Arabic–Danish interpreter. In other instances, statements from the Palestinian parents derive from written down everyday dialogues, the family's adolescents having been explaining among us. In every case, all dialogues with the parents have been translated from Danish.
3. The 'seven criteria for successful integration' – formulated by the national Think Tank on Integration that worked under the Danish Conservative Liberal government in power from 2001 to 2011 – constitute: 1) Danish skills and education, 2) employment, 3) economic independence, 4) lack of discrimination, 5) contact between foreigners and Danes, 6) participation in political life and 7) fundamental Danish values and norms (The Think Tank on Integration in Denmark 2001).
4. Since 1989, each year, Denmark has been resettling 500 'UN-quota refugees' from around the world, selected by a Danish ministerial delegation. In 2016, the Danish government announced a halt for an indefinite period. In comparison, in 2016, Norway and Sweden resettled approximately 3,000 and 2,000 UN-quota refugees, respectively.
5. Quotations from the Sudanese parents stem from recorded interviews conducted in English.
6. Earlier Head of Office at the Danish Immigration Service (*Udlændingetjeneste*) on the radio program *Orientering*, 1 March 2006, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, Channel 1 (*Danmarks Radio, P1*).

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